



## **MEA Files Lawsuit on Behalf of Portage County Residents After State Regulators Strike Deal with Large Livestock Facility Weakening Environmental Oversight**

*Residents Say Changes to Gordondale Farms' Wastewater Permit Will Perpetuate Drinking Water Pollution*

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**Contact:** Peg Sheaffer, MEA Communications Director  
(608) 247-9684, [psheaffer@midwestadvocates.org](mailto:psheaffer@midwestadvocates.org)

**Madison, WI**— Yesterday, a group of Portage County residents represented by Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA) [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging an illegal settlement agreement between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Gordondale Farms, a large livestock facility at the center of growing concerns over drinking water pollution in Portage County.

The September 2023 settlement agreement was negotiated behind closed doors after Gordondale objected to the terms of a wastewater permit issued by the DNR. The settlement significantly weakened provisions in the permit that required Gordondale to collect data about the impact of its manure spreading practices on the community's water resources.

"Under Wisconsin law, members of the public have a right to participate in permit decisions. These rights are essential for holding agricultural operations accountable to our environmental laws," said MEA Staff Attorney Adam Voskuil. "Shutting our clients out of the process not only deprives them of their rights, it also perpetuates the ongoing drinking water crisis in their community."

"Like other community members, I am disappointed that the DNR chose to engage in closed-door negotiations. Local residents and scientific experts have legitimate concerns about Gordondale's impact on our drinking water, and we should have had a seat at the table too," said Nelsonville resident Lisa Anderson.

Overapplication of manure and commercial fertilizers, coupled with the area's sandy soils, has led to high nitrate levels in the area around Gordondale Farms. Approximately ninety percent of nitrate in groundwater can be traced back to agriculture. In 2018, Portage County tested private wells in Nelsonville and found that [almost half exceeded the safe drinking water standard for nitrate](#). Exposure to high levels of nitrate can cause blue baby syndrome and can increase the risk of birth defects, thyroid disease and colon cancer.

In 2021, [a landmark Supreme Court decision](#) affirmed the DNR's authority to address nitrate contamination and other forms of agricultural pollution by requiring certain large livestock facilities to install groundwater monitoring wells. Rather than comply with the new commonsense monitoring requirements, however, [Gordondale filed a legal challenge](#), which eventually led to the illegal settlement agreement at issue in this case.

*Midwest Environmental Advocates is a nonprofit law center that combines the power of law with the resolve of communities facing environmental injustice to secure and protect the rights of all people to healthy water, land, and air. Learn more at [www.midwestadvocates.org](http://www.midwestadvocates.org) or [www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates](https://www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates).*

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